

TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

Havasunews.com
Serving Lake Havasu City & The Lower Colorado River Area

Print Page

News

ASU announces plan to come to Havasu campus Opening is conditional on a local foundation raising \$2M

By JACKIE LEATHERMAN
Friday, February 18, 2011 12:29 PM MST

Arizona State University will open a campus in Lake Havasu City if \$2 million is raised locally to renovate buildings and to help sustain classes for the first year.

"I've heard a lot of people say, and I tend to agree, this is probably the biggest thing to happen to Lake Havasu City since the London Bridge was put in," said Steve Greeley, Havasu Foundation for Higher Education president. "That's how exciting this is."

The foundation worked for seven years to get the announcement that ASU made to the Arizona Board of Regents Thursday. The Regents oversee the state's university system.

"The reaction to the fact that we are doing this was all completely positive today," said Richard Stanley, ASU's senior vice president and university planner. "We're thrilled. We've been thinking about this idea ... for two years now."

The foundation announced in January 2010 that ASU would consider opening a four-year undergraduate campus at the former Daytona Middle School, now vacant at 98 Swanson Plaza.

A positive outcome of an ASU study, completed in June 2010, showed favorable enrollment should a campus open. University officials project a first-year class of 175 freshmen.

It is estimated to take around \$3.5 million to start the campus. ASU officials have said \$2.5 million will be for first-year operating costs and around \$1 million used for renovations.

Now, the foundation is responsible for generating \$2 million, leaving ASU with a \$1.5 million tab to open the facility.

Stanley said ASU officials were in wait-and-see mode while Arizona's governor and state Legislature figured where the ax would fall — and how hard — for this year's round of budget cuts.

"The hang up for the last number of months has been the level of uncertainty we've had about the overall budget situation for the university (system) as a whole," Stanley said.

He said although the state's budget situation isn't settled, ASU officials felt they couldn't wait any longer to make a decision.

"We really need to take the next step to provide these new options," Stanley said.

Stanley said when the campus opens hinges on how long it takes the foundation to raise its contribution.

The foundation had always planned on fundraising around \$1.3 million for campus renovations, which mainly include painting and landscaping, but had been adamant that the interested college would cover operating costs.

"We've changed our philosophy," Greeley said. "If us helping with a little of the operational costs is going to make this happen, we are willing to up the ante a little bit."

That \$1.3 million has now ballooned to \$2 million for both the renovations and first-year costs, according to Greeley.

He said he thinks fundraising can be done in one year.

"Havasu has always had the reputation of stepping up to the plate when needed," Greeley said. "I do not think ... that an announcement of this magnitude has happened which will be a ... boost to this community. I think the private sector will step up. There are grant dollars out there. I do think it is something that is achievable."

Stanley said once a substantial amount has been raised, it would trigger ASU officials to concentrate on recruiting. He said recruiting usually takes about one year before students first step on the new campus. He said renovations should take about six months.

"The timeline on this really will be something we work on as the circumstances develop," he said.

Greeley said he wants the campus to open in the fall of 2012. He said the foundation would not financially help with operating costs beyond the first year.

"I would hope that the community would rejoice and be extremely supportive of this," Greeley said. "This is something that other cities and communities in the state would wish they had the opportunity that Havasu (now has). That really puts us on the map."

Stanley said students would have the option to complete their four-year degrees in three years once the campus opens using a fast-track program.

Expected degree programs include biology with a focus on river system ecology, communications, business communications, interdisciplinary studies, and education.

"Whether every one of those (will be) available on the first day is a question we will have to work our way through," Stanley said. "Those are the ones we've modeled in order to make this work useful for a variety of degrees."

Stanley said ASU and local partners would finalize the official agreement while the foundation fundraises. The final agreement will go before the Board of Regents for approval, he said.

An original agreement signed between ASU, the foundation, the Lake Havasu Unified School District and the City of Lake Havasu City was signed in March 2010 and renewed throughout the year. The agreement states that the local parties won't solicit other universities to the area throughout the process.

The local school district owns Daytona Middle School. The school board voted to close the school in February 2010 to meet a tightening budget due to local voters' disapproval of a property tax that helped to fund the district. The school closing saved an estimated \$800,000.

Lake Havasu City Mayor Mark Nexsen said the ASU announcement "feels like Christmas all over again."

"I'm thrilled," he said. "We had a lot of hurdles to overcome and we overcame every single one of them. Now it's just a matter of doing a fundraiser and I'm anxious to get started."

Nexsen said the fundraising doesn't need to be centralized in Lake Havasu City, adding the campus would benefit the county, the region and the state.

The Lake Havasu Partnership for Economic Development raised around \$1.7 million seven years ago for the city's business park, he said.

During a phone call in October 2010, Nexsen said ASU officials expressed concern whether they could scrape the money together to make the campus happen.



He said he asked them to put a dollar amount on what they would need in exchange for a commitment to bring a campus here in order to start fundraising.

"We didn't know that we had something for sure until about a week ago," Nexsen said.

He said Thursday the buzz around the community indicates to him the campus would be supported.

"Everyone's saying 'I heard about ASU. I'm thrilled. I'm excited,'" he said. "It's been a team effort. Everybody had a part. We all played a part. We all worked together and we all made it happen."

Bill Ullery, one of the original foundation members, said when the foundation started in 2004 people originally thought it would take 10 to 15 years to bring a campus here and it would be on the lakeside of the city.

"But the cost of doing that was scaring people off," Ullery said. "That would have been a \$40 to \$50 million upfront fundraising effort. The availability of the Daytona school, which was painful for the school board, was an opportunity for another use."

Now, after seven years of persistence, Ullery said the "work just started."

But for him, first thing was first Thursday afternoon:

"I'm having a drink and I'm going to have another one," he said.

You may contact the reporter at jleatherman@havasunews.com

[RSS](#) [What is RSS?](#)

All original content Copyright © 2011 Today's News Herald and may not be reprinted without permission. Today's News Herald Online is a service of Today's News Herald, Inc. By using the site, you agree to abide and be bound by the site [Terms of Use](#), which prohibit commercial use of any information on the site. Today's News Herald is a publication of River City Newspapers Inc. All Rights Reserved.